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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports the initial findings of a survey of family and home literacy factors that may influence the development of phonological awareness skills for preliterate English learners during the acquisition phase of reading development in a second language (L2). Preliminary findings are from the first year of a 3-year longitudinal study of the effects of early intervention phonological skills training for low performing, preliterate English learners in their first language (L1) to promote cross-language transfer to L2 reading abilities. Family and home literacy survey data were collected from 247 families of kindergarten students enrolled in 13 English-only and/or bilingual "Spanish/English" classrooms in 3 public schools in Southern California. Preliminary analyses revealed that Spanish was the predominant language across family and home contexts. While socioeconomic status and parent education levels were generally low, families were involved in early literacy activities at home. There was a variation in the emphases families placed on the type of literacy activities and the frequency of family literacy engagement with their child. The results revealed high paternal aspirations for their children's reading and academic achievement in Spanish and English. There were statistically significant differences between the family ratings of importance for their children's language and literacy achievement in Spanish and English. (Contains 11 references and 5 tables) (Author/KFT)

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Family and Home Literacy Practices:  
Mediating Factors for Preliterate English Learners at Risk

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### Abstract

This paper reports the initial findings of a survey of family and home literacy factors that may influence the development of phonological awareness skills for preliterate English learners during the early acquisition phase of reading development in a second language (L2). Preliminary findings are from the first year of a three-year longitudinal study of the effects of an early intervention phonological skills training for low performing, preliterate English learners in their first language (L1) to promote cross-language transfer to L2 reading abilities. Family and home early literacy survey data were collected from 247 families of kindergarten students enrolled in 13 English-only and/or bilingual *Spanish/English* classrooms in three public school districts in Southern California. Preliminary analyses revealed that Spanish was the predominant language across family and home contexts. While SES and parent education levels were generally low, families were involved in early literacy activities at home. There was variation in the emphasis families placed on the type of literacy activities and the frequency of family literacy engagement with their child. The results revealed high parental aspirations for their child's reading and academic achievement in Spanish and English. There were statistically significant differences between the family ratings of importance for their child's language and literacy achievement in Spanish and English.

Research on the cross-language transfer of phonological awareness skills for English learners indicates that the development of proficiency in first language (L1) reading structures may significantly influence reading acquisition in second language (L2) reading structures (Durgunoglu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993; Cisero & Royer, 1995). Individual differences in phonological awareness development in preliterate L1 learners are among the strongest predictors of early word decoding abilities in their primary language (Burgess, 1997). Specifically, young children's phonological sensitivity to letter knowledge, rhyme, and the way in which words can be broken into smaller phonological units reveals a powerful link to their later success in learning to read (Baker, Fernandez-Fein, Scher, & Williams, 1998; Raz & Bryant, 1990).

Although there is emerging evidence about the predictive relationship between phonological awareness and early word decoding ability in L1 learners, little is known about the potential correlates between young children's development of phonological awareness and the early influences of family and home literacy factors (Baker et al., 1998; Burgess, 1997; Raz & Bryant, 1990). Moreover, even less is known about the relationship of family and home literacy factors on L2 literacy development for English learners who enter school speaking another primary language.

Studies examining the relationship between family and home literacy factors and the development of phonological awareness skills have generally focused on global measures of socio-economic status (SES) variables (Burgess, 1997). SES was found to be moderately correlated to phonological awareness in preliterate children (Burgess, 1997). However, few studies have examined what variables constitute the family and home literacy environment (Burgess, 1997). Our review of the literature found that there

exists a paucity of standardized early home literacy measures. Non-standardized measures reviewed for our investigation included: the *Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire* (Burgess, 1997); the *Home Activities Survey* (Santos, 1998); and the *Home Learning Profile* (Heath, Levin, & Tibbetts, 1993).

This paper reports the initial findings of various family and home literacy factors that may influence the development of phonological awareness skills for preliterate English learners during the early acquisition phase of reading development in L2. These preliminary findings resulted from the first year of a three-year longitudinal study of the effects of an early intervention L1 phonological skills training to promote cross-language transfer to L2 reading abilities in low performing, preliterate English learners. Further comprehensive, longitudinal analyses of family and home literacy variables and parent participation with the early intervention components of the project will also be examined as the investigation proceeds.

### Method

Research sites. Data were gathered from 13 kindergarten classrooms in three public school districts in Southern California. The type of kindergarten instruction delivered ranged from English-only to bilingual in English and Spanish.

Participants. The sample was comprised of 247 families of kindergarten students. The mean age of the 247 students was 5.29 years ( $SD = .51$ ). Eighty-five percent of the students were Latino, 5 % Caucasian, 5 % Other, 4 % Asian, and 0.4 % African American. The students attended kindergarten for an average of 86.5 days at the time of testing at year one of the three-year longitudinal study. Table 1 shows the selected characteristics of the survey participant families and their children.

Procedures. The families of participating children in the study were invited to participate as respondents to our family survey. Survey data was collected from the families by sending the surveys home with the students in their weekly school folders. Parents were instructed to return completed surveys to their child's respective classroom teacher in an enclosed envelope in order to protect their confidentiality. Completed surveys were collected by project staff.

Instrument. The family survey instrument was developed specifically for the purpose of this study. Survey items were constructed from the *Home Activities Survey* by Santos (1998), the *Home Literacy Survey* by Burgess (1997), and from an extensive review of the literature with an emphasis on identified family and home early literacy variables (Baker, Fernandez-Fein, Scher, & Williams, 1998; Santos, 1998; Burgess, 1997; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994; Chaney, 1994; Raz & Bryant, 1990; Goldenberg, 1987). For an extensive review of the literature on the influence of family and home factors on the development of early language and literacy skills for L1 learners, see Scarborough and Dobrich (1994).

The survey items were constructed in four content domains: A) family composition, SES, and language use (e.g. What language do you use most frequently to speak to your child?); B) Family exposure and knowledge of print and media (e.g. How often does your family read newspapers or magazines in Spanish?); C) Family-home literacy practices (e.g. How often does your family teach the alphabet to your child?); and D) Parental aspirations for their child's reading and academic achievement (e.g. I want my child to learn to read in English).

Data Analysis. A preliminary series of item analyses and reliability computations was performed for the family survey instrument during the initial pilot and field testing phase. The instrument was pilot tested with families in two kindergarten classrooms at two public elementary schools selected as pilot sites for assessment and intervention training. Revisions of the instrument were made based on comments solicited from families and teachers about the readability and clarity of the items and the instructions for the survey instrument.

### Results

For the purposes of this paper, descriptive statistics and a preliminary analysis of mean differences between selected variables are reported. Comprehensive analyses of correlations between variables as well as results from multiple regression and factor analyses will be reported in a future manuscript.

#### Family Composition and Language Use

Family Composition and SES. The mean household size reported by the families surveyed comprised 2.5 adults and 2.5 children. Fifty-four percent of the families surveyed reported a yearly household income of less than \$19,000 dollars, which was below the U. S. Census Bureau's 1999 annual weighted poverty threshold for a family of five at \$20,127. Demographic data on parent education level revealed that 56 % of the parents received less than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level education. Tables 1 and 2 show demographic and descriptive statistics for family and language variables.

Language Use. Spanish was the most frequently spoken home language (55 %) reported by the families followed by both Spanish and English (37 %). The families indicated that Spanish (78 %) was the first language spoken by their child and Spanish

(65 %) was also their child's most frequently spoken language at home. Moreover, Spanish (49 %) was the child's most frequently spoken language outside of the home, followed by English (40 %). Families indicated that Spanish (75 %) was the primary language spoken with their child and caregivers.

#### Family Exposure and Knowledge of Print and Media

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for variables measuring family exposure and knowledge of print and media. To determine if there were mean differences in the frequency of family viewing of Spanish versus English language media and family reading of Spanish versus English media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, books), paired samples (2-tailed) t tests were used. The frequency of number of hours per day of family viewing of Spanish language media ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ) versus English language media ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) was statistically significant ( $t = -4.7$ ,  $df = 235$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Mean differences between the frequency of family reading Spanish newspapers/magazines ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ) and English newspapers/magazines ( $M = 1.7$ ,  $SD = .9$ ) yielded no statistical differences ( $t = 1.0$ ,  $df = 237$ ,  $p = .29$ ). The mean differences for the frequency of family reading books in Spanish ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) versus family reading books in English ( $M = 2.2$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) were statistically significant ( $t = 2.5$ ,  $df = 241$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

#### Family-Home Literacy Practices

Forty-nine percent of the families reported teaching alphabet letters to their child every day, and 31 % of the families reported reading to their child daily. Thirty percent of the families engaged in oral story telling and singing songs with their child every day, and 27 % of the families surveyed played rhyming word games daily with their child. Sixty-three percent of the families reported teaching their child to write his/her name



every day, and 61 % of the families indicated that they taught their child to count on a daily basis. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the family and home literacy variables.

### Family Aspirations for Their Child's Reading and Academic Achievement

Language. Families in this study responded with uniformly high aspirations for their young children's reading and educational achievement. Of the 247 families surveyed, 95 % of the families ranked as "very important" that their child speak English well while 74 % of the parents ranked as "very important" that their child speak Spanish. To determine if there were mean differences in family ratings of importance for their child to speak and learn to read in Spanish and/or English, paired samples (2-tailed) t tests were used. Family ratings of importance for their child to speak Spanish ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = .6$ ) versus English ( $M = 3.9$ ,  $SD = .2$ ) yielded statistically significant differences ( $t = 6.9$ ,  $df = 233$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

Reading. Family ratings for their child's reading achievement revealed equally high aspirations. Ninety-six percent of the families expressed enormous importance that their child learn to read in English, and 75 % of the parents attributed the same level of importance for their child to learn to read in Spanish. Mean differences between the families' ratings of importance for their child to learn to read in Spanish ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = .6$ ) versus learning to read in English ( $M = 3.9$ ,  $SD = .3$ ) were statistically significant ( $t = 6.7$ ,  $df = 233$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

Academic achievement. The families in our study expressed high aspirations for their young children's educational future. One hundred percent of the surveyed families indicated as "very important" that their children's education prepare them for the their

These significant differences in family viewing of TV media and book reading in Spanish and English may be explained in part by the finding that Spanish was identified by the families surveyed as the predominant home language. There was a variation in the emphasis placed on the type of literacy activities and the frequency of family literacy engagement with their child. While SES and parent education levels were generally low, families were involved in early literacy activities at home with their children.

Families in this study reported uniformly high aspirations for their young children's reading and academic achievement. Some of the families' aspirations yielded statistically significant differences in the following areas: family ratings of importance for their child to speak Spanish versus English; and family ratings of importance for their child's reading achievement in Spanish versus English. These findings may suggest families valued the importance of language and literacy acquisition in both Spanish and English, however, their expectations for their child's language and reading achievement in English were paramount. Further comprehensive, longitudinal analyses of these family and home literacy variables will be examined as this investigation proceeds.

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**Table 1.**  
**Background Characteristics of the Survey Participant Families and their Children**

Respondents	Number	%	Child	Number	%
<i>Relationship to Child</i>			<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Mother	172	72	African American	1	0.4
Father	44	18	Asian	9	4
Mother and Father	19	8	Caucasian	11	5
Other Family Member	5	2	Caucasian-Latino	4	1
<i>Parent Education Level</i>			Latino	201	85
No schooling	1	0.4	Other	11	5
Elementary-6 grade	72	31	<i>Child Age</i>		
7-8 grade	59	25	5 yrs.	178	72
9-12 grade	58	25	6 yrs.	67	27
1-2 years of college	26	11	7 yrs.	1	0.4
3-4 years of college	10	4	<i>Child Gender</i>		
College graduate or higher	7	3	Female	111	45
<i>Yearly Household Income</i>			Male	134	55
Under \$15,000	85	37	<i>Preschool Attendance</i>		
\$15,000-\$19,000	40	17	Yes	108	46
\$20,000-\$29,000	56	24	No	129	54
\$30,000-\$39,000	24	10			
\$40,000-\$49,000	11	5			
\$50,000-\$59,000	3	1			
\$60,000-and above	11	5			

NOTE. Some percentages do not add up to 100% because of missing data.

**Table 2.**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Family Composition and Language Use*

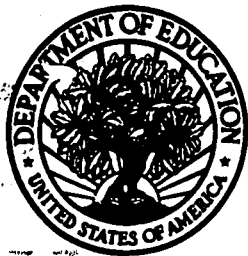
Variable	Mean	SD
Number of Adults at Home	2.5	1.1
Number of Children at Home	2.5	1.1
Languages Spoken at Home	1.8	1.0
Child's First Language	1.3	.6
Child's Most Frequently Used Language at Home	1.4	.7
Child's Most Frequently Used Language Outside of Home	1.6	.7
Survey Respondent's Most Frequently Used Language with Child	1.3	.6

**Table 3.**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Family Exposure and Knowledge of Print and Media*

Variable	Frequency of...	
	Mean	SD
Computer Use by Child	1.3	.7
Family Viewing of Spanish-Language Media	2.7	1.2
Family Viewing of English-Language Media	3.1	1.1
Family Reading Spanish Newspapers/Magazines	1.8	1.0
Family Reading English Newspapers/Magazines	1.7	.9
Family Reading Books in Spanish	2.5	1.3
Family Reading Books in English	2.2	1.1

**Table 5.**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Family Aspirations for Child's Reading and Educational Achievement*

Variable	Importance that my child...	
	Mean	SD
Speaks English	3.9	.2
Speaks Spanish	3.7	.6
Learns to Read in English	3.9	.3
Learns to Read in Spanish	3.7	.6
Education Prepares for the Future	3.9	.6
Completes High School	3.9	.1
Attends College	3.9	.3



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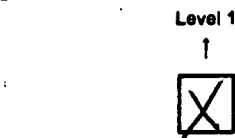
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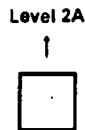
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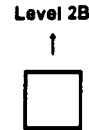
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